

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

The Supplement this week contains extracts from a letter addressed by Professor Karl Barth to the editor of the French magazine *Foi et Vie*. Dr. Barth has exerted a more powerful and widespread influence on the Christian thought of our time than any other Christian thinker. While he is of Swiss nationality and is now professor in the University of Basel, he lived and taught for many years in Germany. On account of his outspoken and fearless criticism of the Nazi treatment of the Church he was forced to resign his professorship and to leave Germany.

## A DECLARATION BY AMERICAN CHRISTIANS.

Another notable document is a recent declaration by a number of leading Christian ministers and laymen in the United States. They have been moved to make the statement by their dissent from the position taken by many who are looked on as spokesmen of the Churches. That position is, broadly speaking, that since all war is un-Christian Christians in neutral countries should not discriminate between belligerents. To the signatories of the declaration this attitude seems to be due to intellectual confusion and to tend to moral callousness and national self-righteousness and irresponsibility.

The declaration is too long to quote in full, but the following extracts give its substance:

"For the ultimate causes of the conflicts in both Europe and Asia all nations, including our own, must share responsibility.

"This admission of common guilt as regards the *origins* of the present wars must not blind us to the incalculable issues at stake in the *outcome* of these wars. A distinction must always be made between moral accountability for conditions leading to war and moral obligation to deal with those conditions and their threatening consequences.

"More particularly, an interpretation of the present conflicts as 'merely a clash of rival imperialisms' can spring only from ignorance or moral confusion. The basic distinction between civilisations in which justice and freedom are still realities and those in which they have been displaced by ruthless tyranny cannot be ignored. To equate what the Soviet Republics are doing in Finland and what the Finns are doing to defend their liberties is to deny all ethical discriminations for the sake of a purely abstract perfection. To suggest that nothing of consequence is at stake in the success of Japanese, German and Russian designs on China, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the Baltic States, or in the successful resistance of these latter nations, is to be guilty of moral irresponsibility. A victory for the Allied Powers or for China would not of itself assure the establishment of justice and peace, but the victory of Germany, Russia or

Japan would inevitably preclude the justice, freedom of thought and worship, and international co-operation which are fundamental to a Christian world order. Therefore, Christians in neutral countries cannot evade the ethical issues involved and the consequent claim upon their sympathy and support.

"The Churches in the United States are under obligation to lead their nation to assume a responsible relationship to the present conflicts.

"The United States cannot hope to have a part in determining a just and stable peace unless, during the conflicts, she proves herself alive to the deeper issues involved, sympathetic with the warring peoples in their bitter struggles, and prepared to make her contribution to a better future. That contribution cannot be merely in terms of moral preachments and lofty ideals for the conduct of other nations, but rather of responsible national participation in the long and painful task of peaceful reconstruction.

"The best elements in all belligerent nations are hoping and praying for a new international order. That order must promise to every people, aggressors no less than victims of aggression, justice, opportunity and the realisation of legitimate aspirations. No lesson from recent history is clearer than that such an order is impossible unless every nation is ready to accept some limitation upon unqualified national action in the interests of the welfare of all peoples. We believe that it is the business of the Christian Church in neutral as well as in warring nations to prepare their people for the necessary sacrifices and responsibilities. Here is the special task and obligation of Christian leadership at the present time."

## THE H. G. WELLS CAMPAIGN

In referring last week to Mr. H. G. Wells I had in mind a series of articles appearing in *Illustrated* (beginning in the issue of January 20th) and the *Daily Herald* (beginning on February 5th), in which Mr. Wells expounds the charter of the Rights of Man included in his recent book *The New World Order* (Secker and Warburg, 6s.).

These articles are intended to initiate a nation-wide debate. Steps are being taken to promote active discussion in the Dominions, France, America and other neutral countries. It is hoped that out of the discussion ideas will emerge which will gain popular support and influence the nature of the peace.

The debate may prove to be highly important. I said last week that the people of this country dislike National-Socialism and atheistic Communism, but are hazy about what they want in their place. Mr. Wells has a plan. It promises world-wide peace and social justice, which is what plain men everywhere are longing for. The effect of this hunger in men's souls may quite well be a swift movement in support of Mr. Wells' charter. One of my younger friends who has just gone to China wrote in a letter I received a few days ago that he strongly suspected that this country was probably Wellsian at heart.

Mr. Wells (like the rest of us) is more successful in describing the sort of society we ought to desire than in telling us how we are to get it. It is a question, moreover, whether his view of the nature of man is a true one; if we are wrong on that point, our plans, however well-meant, will in the end come to grief. It is a further question whether he diagnoses rightly the causes which have brought about the terrible violations of the dignity of the human person which we are witnessing to-day. If we fail to discover and remove the real causes of these evils, mere insistence on the sacredness of personality will not help us; the more we insist on it the less of it we shall get. Mr. Wells' charter needs to be subjected to searching critical examination.

But it is also true that there is a note struck in this charter which awakens a deep responsive chord in the heart of man. The demand that no man shall be subjected to bodily assault, except in restraint of his own violence, nor to torture, beating, or "any other bodily punishment" is an assertion of the inviolability of the person which is inherent in the Christian view of man. How intolerable should be the thought of such indignities to those who are the objects of God's care and love.

The revolt of the human spirit against the degradation of man and the denial of his worth to God has endless promise. But that promise can be fulfilled only if the limpse of man's true worth leads to a right understanding of his relation to his natural environment, to his fellow-men and to God.

## RELIGION IN THE FRENCH ARMY.

In France, where priests and ministers of religion are subject to conscription, thousands, when war was declared, left their parishes to serve in the ranks. The Roman Catholic review *Etudes* contains an article on the religious life of France as seen through the eyes of priests who mingle intimately with all classes, types and creeds in the anonymous life of the French army.

The writer distinguishes various types influenced in different degrees by the Christian tradition in accordance with their geographical or social environment. First, there is the traditional Christianity of the peasant communities, more particularly from the West, Lorraine, Savoy and the Cevennes. These have a robust faith not unmixed with superstition, but their inability to understand any other point of view impairs their spiritual influence. Side by side with these intransigent peasants there are groups belonging to the middle classes or aristocracy who hold firmly to the Christian tradition. Again, there are those who have a family connection with the church, but whose concern with it is social rather than religious. Many of these come from business life and often have money and spend it in selfish ways. This type of worldly Christian discredits the Christian name.

Beyond these is the great dechristianised world—the millions of average Frenchmen—whose attitude in the main is one of profound indifference to religion, though a connection is often maintained in baptisms, marriages, and funerals. There survives belief in the value of certain rites, and a vague need of some protection against the hazards of life. What is striking is that the anti-clericalism which formerly prevailed has given place in general to an attitude of respect and friendliness towards the priest-soldier. While ignorance and indifference remain, there are evidences of an awakening of religious interest and a return to faith. This is specially marked among the intellectuals.

## PERSONAL RELATIONS IN THE ARMY.

I have a letter from one of my friends who is a devoted social worker, and who, when war came, volunteered for the army and was given a commission. He makes the following comment on the statement in a recent Supplement that the chief abomination of war is the totality of impersonal relationships in which it involves those who take part in it:—

"Surely one fact established pretty well beyond question in the last war was that the comradeship of the trenches could be so overpoweringly grand a thing as to make at horrible time, in spite of all its horrors, the happiest time in the lives of a great many people who took part in it."

"I myself am much interested in the kind of personal relationships the army

develops—e.g., between a platoon commander and his boys. Of course there is a high degree of artificiality and impersonalness about it in one way. But on the other side there is along with this a more real and fundamental interdependence between the platoon commander and his platoon in actual warfare than can be at all easily paralleled in the days of peace.

"So, granted your chap's point in one direction, in another there is the typically human fact that most people need something as terrible as war to help them to discover what personal relationships can really mean."

## THE RESURRECTION OF CHRISTENDOM.

There is nothing for which many of us strain our eyes more eagerly than to discover signs of a quickening of spiritual energies to oppose the forces of evil, which are carrying the world to disaster. I have already mentioned in this connection President Roosevelt's approach to the Pope. The Pope's reply describes the initiative of the President as "an exemplary act of fraternal and hearty solidarity against the chilling breath of aggressive and deadly godless and anti-Christian tendencies that threaten to dry up the fountain whence civilisation has come and drawn its strength."

I find encouragement, also, in the following words of M. Jacques Maritain—one of the acutest observers of contemporary affairs—in a recent article in *The Tablet*:

"It is a token of no small import that both in France and in Great Britain an idea is gaining ground with ever-growing force: it is the idea of a new world order in keeping with the vital principles of our civilisation, which have at last been rediscovered, and in keeping with all that civilisation has inherited both from humanity and from Christianity. To put it plainly, it is the idea of a new Christendom."

## THE NEWS-LETTER.

When the News-Letter was started I promised to let you have each week either six or eight pages. Except for our Christmas number we have given you eight pages every week, and this may prove to be more than we can afford. Last week I let you have ten pages, and to restore the balance this number has to be kept to six.

The number of our members is now 90<sup>36</sup>. More than 500 folders for keeping the News-Letters have been ordered by our members.

From our Post-Bag.—"You will like to know that the Christian News-Letter passed round week by week among the parishioners of this rural parish, and quite frequently finds its way to the village pub, where it is invariably listened to with respect."

Yours sincerely,

P. H. Oldham

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## THE WAR AND PEACE

### Extracts from a Letter by Dr. Karl Barth to a French Editor

There can be no question that this war is for all of us a very special war, and that it has a quite other aspect than that of 1914 and most of the wars of recent centuries. The National-Socialism of Hitler, after making Germany the peculiar scene of its terror, became in growing measure a menace to the whole of Europe. This menace has led to an awakening. Amid the sin and shame of the life of all peoples there is also, through the goodness of God, a remnant of order and justice, of free humanity, and, above all, as that which gives the meaning to all the rest, of freedom to proclaim the Gospel. Where Hitler rules there is an end even to this remnant. Hitler did not want, however, to rule in Germany alone. When that became so clear that even the blind could see it, war was inevitable.

"There must be an end to it," your Minister-President said in a decisive hour, and his English colleague repeated the same thing. The responsibility can safely be left to these statesmen how deep the meaning of their decision goes. It is certain that every Christian, and just because he is a Christian, who in recent years has experienced what has been happening with open eyes and ears, must for his part say yes and amen to this: "There must be an end to it."

Certainly France and England had, and have, also Imperialistic reasons for this war. That does not, however, in the least alter the fact that there would be no excuse before God and man if the attempt were not made to put an end to this menace of Hitlerism. War was the sole means which was left for this purpose.

The Church of Jesus Christ cannot and will not make war. It can and will only pray, believe, hope, love, proclaim and hear the Gospel. It knows that the event which brings real, eternal, and divine help to us poor men has happened, is happening, and will happen, not by might or power or any human effort and achievement, but by the Spirit of God. It will therefore not identify the cause of Britain

and France with the cause of God, and will not preach a crusade against Hitler. He Who died on the Cross died for Hitler, too, and for all the confused people who are willingly or unwillingly, standing under his flag.

But just because the Church knows that there is a "justification" which we men cannot achieve for ourselves, it cannot be indifferent or neutral in great things and in small where the question of *justice* is raised, and the attempt to erect some poor measure of human justice over against overflowing and crying injustice. Where that is at stake the Church cannot refuse to bear its witness to the truth that it is God's commandment that justice shall be done on earth, that this is the very purpose for which God has set up political authorities and given them the sword, and that when political authorities seek to protect justice, in spite of all the mistakes of which they may otherwise be guilty, they legitimate themselves as true authorities by doing so, and may lay claim to the obedience of everyone.

The Churches must with repentance and sobriety pray for a just peace, and with the same repentance and sobriety tell every people that it is necessary and worthwhile to fight and to suffer for this just peace. They must certainly not persuade the people of the democratic States that they are fighting for the cause of God; they must, however, say to them that we have in God's name a right to be human, and must defend ourselves with the strength of desperation against the invasion of open inhumanity.

The Church will have to say many comforting things in all countries in the dark times upon which, to all appearances, we are now entering. It will, however, be able to give real comfort only if, without hate or pharisaism or any illusions about the goodness of any men anywhere, it is ready to say seriously and frankly that to-day resistance is a necessity.

The Church of Jesus Christ will then also know and say this other thing just as clearly:

that the last thing in war—and especially in this war—cannot be war itself, and that war, like a painful but purposeful operation, can only be carried out for the sake of help and healing and life. The time may come very soon when it will be urgently necessary in all countries to bring this side of the matter to the front.

Dear French friends, you know how much I am bound up with Germany, its Church and its people; and you will not take it amiss if I ask you to occupy yourselves and your congregations even now with the question of what is to happen when the misfortune into which Germany has thrown itself will come to light in its defeat, which, according to human calculation, can hardly be avoided. The German people is not a bad people, no worse certainly than all other peoples; and the idea that it must be punished as specially wicked to-day is both, from a Christian and from a human point of view, untenable. But National-Socialism of Hitler is a peculiarly evil expression of the unusual political stupidity, confusion and helplessness of the German people. The German people is suffering from the heritage of a profound and consequently especially wild, foolish, unrealistic heathenism.

All nations have their bad dreams. Hitlerism is at present the bad dream of German pagans, whose Christianisation in a Lutheran form conserved and strengthened certain elements in their paganism. It is a specially bad dream, a specially deadly one for the Germans themselves and all the rest of us. Apart from the pain which it is causing to the dreamers themselves, it has made them into a threat to Europe.

Now it must first of all be made harmless. Those who now have it as their enemy, and those who may become its enemy, must, however, if they themselves wish to think in a Christian and not in a heathen way, keep steadily in view the fact that in this enemy they have to do with a sick man. Very firm but very merciful hands will be necessary. It will indeed be necessary to make further developments along the fatal line from Frederick the Great via Bismarck to Hitler a physical impossibility. It will, however, be still more necessary to make visible to the German

nation something of the political wisdom which is still so strange to it now. This means that there must be provided for it such conditions of life as must hinder it from continuing to dream that bad dream in any new form. Its delusion that it can only help itself by terror in relation to others must be taken away from it by a demonstration by those others that they are in all circumstances determined to be just to its real needs which arise from its geographical situation. The coming peace may have to be politically and militarily harder than the Versailles Treaty. If, however, everything is not again to be in vain, it will have to be wiser and juster—i.e., above all, more solicitous.

It was dangerous that people wanted so long to give Hitler a chance. It would, however, be much more dangerous if people were not ready after the war to give the German nation an honest chance.

But it would be very unchristian, dear friends, and therefore very unwise, if we were to put forward all these considerations without at the end acknowledging frankly that man thinks—and man ought to think—but God alone directs. We can and ought to assume and sustain our responsibilities—our political and, where it is demanded, also our military responsibilities. It does not, however, lie in our hand to determine what will come out of it all. And we must in no case be surprised or complain if everything should turn out contrary to our present hope and intention, our plan and will.

It will only be God's grace that can protect us from the evils which threaten us. Are we ready to recognise His grace even if He should *not* protect us? Are we ready for a situation in which defenceless confession of Jesus Christ is the only thing that is left to us? Are we ready, even then, to remain true to our God and to rejoice in Him? It depends on the answer to this question whether we are justified in having recourse to arms, and whether we have a good conscience and can ask God from our hearts for His support. Only if we have this readiness is our act of resistance a good act. We may, and must, know that God rules as He pleases, and that He makes no mistakes.

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